



## **GOOD KIDS: A Basic Parenting Guide**

Techniques compiled using research from parents, pediatricians, psychologists, gang members, and kids in prison for violent crimes. Parents who were consistent, informative and fair had children who were well behaved. These kids were happier than their peers. They had a very low incidence of drug use, no violent behavior, no suicides. With minor adjustments, these suggestions are also useful in the classroom. It is important that parents agree on behavior control. Two parents who use different systems can do more harm than good.

**1. USE CONSEQUENCES, NOT PUNISHMENT.** Set up a system in your family or classroom where undesired behavior results in a consequence. Many actions are expected in children at different ages. There should be no consequence for normal childhood behavior. Books are available that describe the things your child will do at each age.

Make a list of the behaviors you wish to stop. Begin with your strongest areas of concern. List a possible consequence for each action. Don't be too strict. The severity of the consequence is less important than the consistent use of it. If the kids are old enough, have a family meeting and discuss the new system. Tell the children that their actions will result in consequences and use the list as a starting point. Allow the kids to participate in deciding the final list. By the end of the meeting you should have reached agreement on the consequence for each action. Give each child a copy of the list. Don't impose consequences unless they are on the list. This system only works when the child knows the consequence for each action. If a child does something for which you have not imposed a consequence, say: "I am unhappy, you should have known better, I know it will not happen again, but if it should happen again the consequence will be \_\_\_\_\_. " This is then added to both copies of the list.

Once you have set a consequence for an action, you must impose it every time. Do not threaten. If the rule is broken, the consequence is imposed. The process will not work if you say "If you do that again . . . " or "Do you want . . . " The rules must always be the same, a child should not have to behave differently because you had a bad day nor should they get away with anything because you are having a good day. It may sound strange, but kids love the consistency.

Grades should not be considered for consequences, only negative behavior. A child who is getting to bed on time, doing homework and trying, should be praised even if grades are not high.

**2. TIME-OUT AND GROUNDED.** An effective tool for controlling behavior in children is "time-out." Once a parent learns the proper use of this technique, it is very effective. What works best is one minute for each year of a child's age, up to twelve. The child must sit in one place and not play for the period of the time-out.



The only available entertainment is watching the clock until the seconds of each minute have passed. One minute per year of age was decided by trial and error. It appears to be just enough to accomplish good behavior without resentment for the consequence being too harsh.

Older children can be sent to their room, or any room where they are not allowed to watch TV or play. Time-out for a teenager is similar to being grounded. One day of not being allowed to talk on the phone, go out with their friends, or drive a car, will work until they are old enough to live on their own outside of your house. By then they will be secure and ready for the consequences of the adult world.

Avoid threats. Never say: "If you do that again you will get time-out." This is confusing to a child. Kids are eight to ten years old before they are capable of the adult reasoning behind the "threat, threat, punish" system. They think: "If I did something wrong, why was I not punished?" and: "Why is it okay sometimes and other times I am punished?"

Consequences may be adjusted to fit the individual. What works for most may not work for all. You must be sure the application is one-hundred-percent consistent. Kids need to know where the line is located. They want it black and white. Children have difficulty understanding gray areas.

**NEVER THREATEN, SET THE RULES AND STICK TO THEM. IF YOU MAKE A STATEMENT, AND LATER FAIL TO STAND BY IT, KIDS WILL LOSE RESPECT FOR YOU. THEY HATE LIES MORE THAN THEY HATE CONSEQUENCES. LEARN TO SAY ONLY WHAT YOU REALLY MEAN.**

**3. BE FAIR AND LOVING.** When a child commits a wrong for which no consequence has been imposed, some parents say: "They got away with it." Not really, they have been informed that you are not pleased with their actions, and they now know exactly what will happen to them if it is repeated. This is a learning experience for both parent and child. Parents who treat their children in a fair and a consistent manner will be respected.

Allow your child to suggest consequences. Kids believe it will be easy for them to behave in the future. One twelve-year-old, who said he would never use drugs, suggested permanent grounding and no car through high school. They decided on: "no car at age sixteen or loss of the car for six months for drug or gang activity." It became a contract that the child remembered when tempted. He later said he would have used drugs when they were offered, but he was too afraid of losing the car. If your child thinks that mom and/or dad will give in and get the car in spite of a minor infraction, the system will not work.

If you assume that your child will not use drugs or commit violent acts, you are living in a dream world. Why not make a contract with your child about drugs, gangs and violent behavior. The parents of those kids on the news are in shock when their little darling is accused of murder. Do not go into denial when you get a hint of problems.



**4. AVOID NEGATIVE COMMENTS.** The more impartial you are when imposing the consequence, the better the results will be. You can even take the child's side and say "I'm sorry this happened and you have to be grounded for three days, but the time will pass quickly and I'm sure it won't happen again." Do not make angry statements. Negative comments move the system from loving and fair to nasty and vindictive. Your children will treat you and the rest of society the way they are treated. It is easier to become successful in life if you are positive rather than negative .

**5. TALK WITH YOUR KIDS.** Some people avoid saying what they need to say because they are afraid of the results. The outcome is always worse than it would have been. One couple failed to discuss their expectations prior to their marriage. Both were afraid such discussions might end the relationship. The result was a divorce after several months of revelations. The marriage would have had a better chance if the issues had been handled during the courtship. It was the way their parents related. Each came from a divorced home. Parents who discuss and solve problems have children who do the same.

Tell your kids the truth. Many rules are for a parent's benefit. "I worry if I do not know where you are. What can we do to solve this problem?" Not: "How dare you not let me know where you are?"

**6. LOVE YOUR CHILDREN UNCONDITIONALLY.** Think about these two statements: 1)"If you ever \_\_\_\_\_, I will disown you!" 2)"I hope you never \_\_\_\_\_, but if it should happen and you need me, I will be here for you!"

Parents who use the first statement have the children who fill in the blanks. The child thinks that the parent is lying. It causes resentment, loss of respect, and a need to prove it is a lie by testing. Parents who use the second statement almost never have the problems. The child knows it is true, has no need to test it, and behaves better out of respect for the parents.

**7. LYING.** Parents tell their children not to lie, but what about parents who lie? How do kids learn to lie? Children want to believe what their mother says is true. How can they if she says things she does not mean just to make her point. Things are said and intended as empty threats. The child resents the threat and the lie attached. Suppose you tell a four-year-old: "I'll pop you if you touch the TV!" Two weeks later they touch it and you say: "I warned you, do that again and I'll pop you!" The child did not forget what you said two weeks ago. He is testing you. If you do not follow through on what you said, the child will lose respect for you and believe it is normal to tell "little" lies.



**8. BE CONSISTENT.** No one is in the same mood at all times. In a class on parenting the teacher asked: "How do you decide when to spank your children?" A man raised his hand and said: "They get spanked if I had a bad day at the office." This was told as a joke on The Tonight Show, but it is often true. Parents think that they are making things easier on themselves if they remain flexible. This is not true. Children do not understand or appreciate being assessed a punishment that was previously unannounced. The same is true if a consequence was announced and not imposed when the rule was broken. Parents must learn to use the same consequence for the same behavior on good and bad days. If you know you are having a bad day, you must remember that your child's future depends on you being consistent and fair. Children should not have to adjust their behavior to fit their parent's moods.

**9. USE A FIXED BEDTIME.** This is the strongest weapon in a parent's arsenal. As long as the child is dependent on the parent for support, they can be required to comply with a firm, fixed bedtime. Bedtime should be 8:00 P.M. on school nights and 9:00 P.M. on non school nights. This can be accomplished by using a digital watch or clock with an alarm. Set the alarm for 8:01 P.M., if a child is not in bed before the alarm sounds, the consequence is a 7:30 bedtime tomorrow. A later bedtime can be earned by good behavior. If the bedtime goes to 8:15 and a negative progress report comes home or the child is sleepy in school, the bedtime goes back to 8:00. Bedtime can be quiet time in their room as they grow older. Once the set bedtime is in place, it can also be used for other purposes. For example: "One minute early bedtime for each toy, video or game not put away."

**10. TELL YOUR CHILDREN THEY ARE WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO BE.** I remember my mother telling me when I was young that I was smart and good looking. I grew up believing both, and I have lived my life as if it were true. I never saw the connection until I read in a psychology book that children believe what they are told about themselves. Telling a child: "You are a bad kid!" may cause them to grow up believing it and allow them to feel comfortable doing the things a bad person would do.

The extreme case of this was a mother who repeatedly told her son: "You are just like your father, you are all bad." The father was in prison for murder. As a man that former little boy is proud to be a killer. He is now on death row for multiple murders. I learned this eleven years ago and started telling people to change the things they say to their kids. One woman told her four-year-old to: "Have a nice day," every morning when she dropped him off at his preschool. After our discussion she started telling him to "be a good boy." He is fifteen now and she wishes she had done the same with her older son who is on probation.

Each parent must decide which positive things they will say to their children. Remember that parents who say negative things pay for it later.





**11. TEACH YOUR CHILDREN VALUES.** What are Values? We all have some concept of what values are, but I like radio psychologist Dr. Laura Schlesinger's definition: "Values are lighthouses, they keep you from crashing on the rocks!" Many children are taught by their parents that values get in the way of shortcuts. Look at the vast number of people who play the lottery hoping to get rich the easy way. The truth is that those dollars would be a million times more likely to make them rich if they were invested. Think what lesson children learn when they see their parents stealing small items from work, calling in sick when they are not, and abusing drugs, legal or illegal. Tobacco and alcohol are drugs, and kids know it. **HONESTY** - Tell the truth! Think about it, you know who is truthful in your group of friends and co-workers, and you usually know when your kids are lying. You should assume they know when you are lying! Parents who tell little lies can be teaching their kids to lie when they think it is necessary. The judgment of a child is not the same as that of an adult. When you catch your child lying, examine yourself.

**COURAGE** - Have the strength to NOT follow the crowd when the crowd is wrong. People of courage say NO and mean it. They influence others by the strength of their convictions. Would you rather be a leader or a follower? It takes courage to be a good leader. Most people would rather follow a leader who is doing the right thing.

**PEACEFULNESS** - Learn to compromise rather than argue. It is not necessary to give in, but realize that however wrong the other person might be, they think they are right. No two people have identical circumstances in their past. Everything you have encountered in your life has had an effect on the way you believe today. The same is true of the other party.

**SELF-RELIANCE** - Be responsible for your own actions. Abandon the need to blame outside forces. It is a commitment to personal excellence in everything you do. Parents must learn to let children make decisions. People who are allowed to make small mistakes as children mature earlier. Their decision making ability enables better life-choices in their teens and twenties.

**SELF-DISCIPLINE** - Use moderation in eating, speaking (don't curse/yell/lie), and use of alcohol/tobacco/cafeine/etc. Our kids know if we are in control and taking care of ourselves. They learn by our example. Children of parents who smoke are twice as likely to start before graduation from high school. Kids who are not smoking by then will probably never start.

**FIDELITY** - Be true to your commitments. If you say it, you should mean it. If you change your mind later, you should know in your heart that it is the right thing to do. Children of parents who know how to make and keep commitments are able to identify and associate with other people who do the same. This will help them in all aspects of life.



**JUSTICE AND MERCY** - Be fair in everything you do. Live by the golden rule. Consider this when setting rules and consequences. Remember what it was like when you were a kid. . . be fair!

**LOVE** - Teach your children to love themselves and to love others. They will always care what happens to themselves and to others.

\* PARENTS, LEARN TO CARE ABOUT YOURSELF. DO NOT MODEL DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR.

\* TELL YOUR CHILDREN THAT THEY ARE LOVED. THEY WILL CARE ABOUT THEMSELVES.

\* CARE ABOUT OTHERS AND TEACH YOUR CHILDREN THE SAME. YOU WILL BE HAPPIER.

Parenting is as difficult as any profession. Why would anyone try it without studying it? I did and the results were not good. After I studied it, my life was easier. I now understand why my kids reacted in such strange ways. I was continually doing things that disrupted their security. Why do we not offer classes for parents at every school in the United States? It took years of research to put together this simple information. A few evenings in parenting classes could have saved me a lot of legwork and made the early lives of two great kids a lot easier and happier.

We need to teach parenting to the next generation. It should be the fourth basic. Raising children correctly is much more important to the future of the world than Reading, wRiting or aRithmetic . Write or call your legislators if you agree with either or both suggestions.

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